

The Arbor

Landscaping Standards — Resident Questions & Answers

The following questions and answers are intended to help residents understand The Arbor's Landscaping Standards, why they matter, and how they will be implemented. We welcome your feedback and encourage you to reach out to the Facilities Manager with any additional questions.

General Questions

Q: Why does The Arbor need formal landscaping standards? Can't we just handle things as they come up?

A: Landscaping decisions made on an ad hoc basis — without guiding principles — tend to be inconsistent, more costly over time, and difficult to defend when residents have differing opinions. Formal standards give the Board, the Landscape Committee, and our contractors a shared framework to work from, so that decisions are made consistently and with a clear long-term purpose: a sustainable, attractive landscape that minimizes maintenance cost. Standards also protect against well-intentioned but ultimately costly choices, such as planting the wrong species in the wrong location.

Q: These standards feel new to me. Are they really new, or have some of these practices been in place before?

A: Several of these standards reflect practices that have been in place at the Arbor for some time such as leaving grass clippings on the lawn. Other practices were implemented in the past but were later discontinued when the Board's composition changed and priorities shifted. One of the key purposes of establishing these as formal written standards is to ensure continuity — so that good practices are maintained regardless of which individuals happen to be serving on the Board at any given time.

Q: Who decides whether these standards are being followed? Who enforces them?

A: The Board is the ultimate authority on these standards. Day-to-day, the Facilities Manager will work with our landscape contractors to ensure standards are being followed. When a contractor or a proposed project might conflict with the standards, the Facilities Manager will bring that to the Board's attention. The standards are not meant to be punitive — they are a guide for consistent decision-making, not a compliance checklist.

Q: Can residents make requests that would require an exception to these standards?

A: Residents are always welcome to bring requests and concerns to the Facilities Manager or the Board. If a request conflicts with the standards, the Committee will explain why and, where possible, suggest an alternative approach that meets the resident's underlying need while staying consistent with the standards. In cases where a compelling reason exists, the Board has the authority to make exceptions — but the expectation is that exceptions will be rare and documented.

Q: Will these standards ever be updated?

A: Yes. The standards include a provision that they be reviewed every five years to ensure they reflect current best practices in sustainable landscaping. Landscape science evolves, our climate continues to change, and what works best today may not be the best approach in a decade. Periodic review ensures the standards remain relevant and effective.

Questions About Cost and HOA Fees

Q: Will implementing these standards cause our HOA fees to increase?

A: The honest answer is: not as a direct result of these standards, and in most cases the opposite is true over time. The standards are fundamentally designed to reduce ongoing maintenance costs — by selecting plants that fit their space naturally (eliminating the need for repeated shearing and pruning), by choosing drought-tolerant and native species (reducing irrigation and fertilizer needs), by managing trees proactively (avoiding far more costly emergency removals and infrastructure damage), and by limiting turfgrass to areas where it is truly needed (one of the highest-cost elements of any landscape). That said, there may be some one-time investments that are reflected in the budget. Those will be communicated transparently as they arise.

Q: Some of these standards mention hiring arborists and doing tree surveys. That sounds expensive — is it necessary?

A: Tree surveys and arborist inspections are one of the most cost-effective investments the Association can make. A single tree that fails unexpectedly — onto a building, a vehicle, or a person — can result in repair costs and liability exposure that far exceeds the total cost of years of professional inspections. Regular surveys also extend the life of our mature trees, which are among the most valuable assets on the property in terms of shade, air quality, and visual appeal. The standards call for surveys every five years and inspections in between — a modest and well-justified expense relative to the risks they help prevent. These expenses are part of the current Arbor budgeting process.

Q: The standards mention replacing corrugated downspouts with metal ones as part of mosquito control. Who pays for that?

A: Downspout replacement is a property maintenance matter and would be handled through the Association's normal maintenance budget, not through a special assessment. The standards flag this as a priority because corrugated downspouts are a significant source of mosquito breeding habitat — eliminating that source is one of the most effective and permanent steps we can take. The cost of replacing downspouts is modest.

Questions About Specific Practices**Q: Why is clover being added to our grass seed? I've heard bees are attracted to clover — is that safe and won't it prevent my child from running in the grass in bare feet?**

A: Clover is being added at a low percentage (approximately 5%) as part of our grass seed mixture because it meaningfully improves soil health by fixing nitrogen naturally, which reduces the need for fertilizer. It also stays greener during dry periods and supports pollinators. Bees are indeed attracted to clover when it is in flower, and a bee foraging on a clover bloom will only sting if physically trapped — for example, if stepped on with bare feet. So a child running barefoot through flowering clover does have a higher chance of stepping on a foraging bee than they would in a pure grass lawn. That said, the risk is still quite low in absolute terms — a foraging honeybee's entire focus is the flower, and a sting only occurs if one is directly stepped on. It is an occasional risk rather than a constant or likely one. It's also worth noting that conventional turfgrass lawns are not without their own sting risk — ground-nesting yellow jackets are common in traditional lawns and are considerably more aggressive when disturbed, with a much higher likelihood of multiple stings rather than a single incidental one.

Q: Why are grass clippings left on the lawn instead of being collected and removed?

A: Leaving clippings on the lawn — a practice known as grasscycling — returns nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium directly back into the soil, acting as a natural slow-release fertilizer. This reduces the amount of synthetic fertilizer needed, saves on disposal costs, and improves soil health over time. When the mower is set at the correct height and the lawn is mowed regularly, the clippings break down quickly and are not visible on the surface.

Q: Why are leaves being left in the garden beds over the winter instead of being cleaned up in the fall?

A: Leaving leaves in the foundation beds and community gardens over winter serves several important purposes. They act as natural insulation for plant roots, retain moisture in the soil, and break down over the winter to enrich the soil. They also provide critical overwintering habitat for beneficial insects, including native bees, which shelter in hollow stems and leaf litter. Cleaning beds too early in spring — before temperatures consistently reach 50 degrees — can destroy those insects before they have emerged. A light layer of mulch is applied on top of the leaves in the spring. This practice is standard in sustainable landscape management and significantly reduces the need for synthetic soil amendments.

Q: What is being done about invasive plants on the property? I've seen English ivy and other invasive species in several areas.

A: The standards specifically require that invasive non-native plants be removed from the Arbor's landscape, including from resident patios where they may have spread. English ivy is among the highest priorities — it spreads aggressively, can damage building masonry, and can kill trees by promoting fungal rot and harboring pests. Because the Arbor has a number of established invasive species, removal will be approached systematically over time rather than all at once, starting with the most problematic and least contained species. Residents who have invasive plants growing on their patios will be notified and asked to remove them as part of this process.

Q: Why can't residents have pest control companies spray their patios for mosquitoes?

A: The standards do not permit aerosol insecticide spraying of patios by pest control companies for several important reasons. These sprays are broad-spectrum — meaning they kill beneficial insects, including pollinators, along with mosquitoes. The fine particles can drift into neighboring units and common areas, affecting air quality. Chemical residues persist on surfaces and can be harmful to children, pets, and wildlife. And most importantly, they are not an effective long-term solution — mosquitoes return quickly because the sprays do nothing to address the source of the problem, which is standing water. The standards instead focus on source reduction (eliminating standing water) and targeted, non-toxic methods such as mosquito dunks, which kill only mosquito larvae using a naturally occurring bacterium and do not harm people, animals, or beneficial insects.

Q: Why are mosquito control standards included in a landscaping document? Mosquitoes seem like a pest control issue, not a landscaping issue.

A: This is a fair question, and the connection is not immediately obvious. The reason mosquito standards belong here is that the most effective mosquito control is not chemical — it is environmental, and the landscape is where that control happens.

Mosquitoes require standing water to complete their life cycle, and the single most impactful thing that can be done to reduce mosquito populations is to eliminate the places where that water collects and sits undisturbed. Many of those places are landscape features: corrugated downspouts that hold water in their ridges, drains that collect debris and pool water after rain, low spots in planted areas, and containers left on patios. In short, the best mosquito control strategy the Arbor has available is a well-maintained landscape. That is why these standards belong here.

Q: I have a tree near my unit that I am concerned about. How do I raise that concern?

A: Please bring your concern to the Facilities Manager. The standards include provisions for an annual walkthrough by the Facilities Manager specifically to identify trees that may need attention between the formal five-year surveys. Your observation is valuable — residents often notice changes in trees near their units before they become obvious to others. Any tree identified as a potential concern will be assessed by a certified arborist before any action is taken.

Q: The standards mention both a five-year tree survey and an arborist inspection every two to three years. What is the difference between the two, and why are both necessary?

A: These are two distinct activities that serve different purposes, and together they form a comprehensive approach to keeping our trees healthy and our community safe.

The five-year tree survey is a thorough, systematic assessment of every tree on the property. It is conducted by a certified arborist and produces a formal written record — essentially a health and condition profile for each tree — that becomes the foundation for a five-year maintenance plan. The survey documents the species, size, condition, and any structural or health concerns for every tree, and it identifies which trees need pruning, treatment, monitoring, or removal over the coming years. By using the same tree company for each survey, the Arbor can update the existing records rather than starting from scratch, which keeps the cost of subsequent surveys lower. Think of the tree survey as the Arbor's master tree plan — a comprehensive snapshot that drives our long-term tree management strategy.

The arborist inspection every two to three years is a more focused, in-between check-in. Trees are living organisms and their condition can change significantly between surveys — a storm can cause structural damage, a pest or disease can take hold, or a previously healthy tree can begin to decline. The purpose of the interim inspection is to catch those kinds of developing problems before they become serious — or dangerous. Think of it as the equivalent of a wellness visit between full physicals — it is not as comprehensive as the survey, but it ensures that nothing critical is being missed in the years between.

Q: If we leave the leaves in the beds every fall and then add an inch of mulch on top each spring, won't that create an ever-increasing buildup of material in the beds over time?

A: This is a very reasonable concern, and the short answer is no — not in any meaningful way. Leaves and organic mulch break down continuously through the process of decomposition, and by the time spring arrives, the leaves left in the fall have already begun to break down significantly. What remains is far less in volume than what was originally left. The inch of mulch added in the spring is applied on top of whatever leaf material remains, and that combined layer continues to decompose through the spring and summer. In practice, the net accumulation from year to year is negligible — what decomposes roughly offsets what is added.

That said, it is worth noting that the standard calls for monitoring bed conditions as part of routine maintenance. If decomposition is slower in a particular bed — due to shade, soil conditions, or plant density — and material does begin to accumulate beyond a healthy level, that will be addressed. The goal is a consistent 2 to 3 inch layer of combined material across the beds, not an ever-growing pile. If any resident notices a specific bed that appears to have excessive buildup, we encourage them to bring it to the attention of the Facilities Manager.

Questions About Communication and Resident Input

Q: How will residents be kept informed about landscaping projects in their area?

A: The standards require that residents be notified one to two months before any significant project — including court renovations, tree removal, and rejuvenation pruning — begins in their area. Notifications will be provided both in writing at the unit and electronically. The goal is to give residents enough advance notice to ask questions, raise concerns, and prepare for any temporary disruption. The Arbor's landscaping standards and best practices are also communicated through newsletters, the Arbor website, a bulletin board (upcoming), and Facilities Manager emails.

Q: How can residents provide input on landscaping decisions?

A: Residents can bring concerns, questions, and suggestions to the Facilities Manager at any time. If appropriate, the Facilities Manager will forward these to the Landscape Committee for advice and/or the Board for discussion/resolution. Residents may also raise landscaping topics at Board meetings. We genuinely value resident input, and a number of the practices reflected in these standards were shaped by feedback from the community over the years.

Questions not addressed here may be directed to the Facilities Manager.